

People - Weyerhaeuser

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Duxbury Clipper

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

By Bonnie Jernigan

Farewell to Edith Greenleaf Weyerhaeuser, 1912-2000

Since ancient times, in this season when our nights are longest we have looked hardest for the stars.

Earlier this month, on a cold December night, Edith Greenleaf Weyerhaeuser asked her son Charles if the stars had come out. He went outside and looked up into the brisk air, then returned to his mother's bedside to tell her that yes, the stars were shining brightly.

A few minutes later, encircled in love by her children, Mrs. Weyerhaeuser died following an illness, leaving a legacy that shines especially brightly for all of us in Duxbury. She, along with her late husband Carl Weyerhaeuser, founded the Art Complex Museum nearly 30 years ago.

Like the stars, art has a way of reaching people in their darkest moments. The gifts of artists can inspire each of us to find our own True North.



A lifelong love of beauty

Edith Weyerhaeuser was born in Washington DC on January 3, 1912, and lived there for a month. Her father was a doctor in the Army Medical Corps, and until she was 14 her family lived on many different Army posts. In a dialogue with Mrs. Weyerhaeuser published almost a decade ago, on the twentieth birthday of the Art Complex Museum, she recalled that her mother, always careful not to take too much along as they traveled, nonetheless had an innate appreciation of art. Her father also had a "feel" for art. In China during the Boxer Rebellion he could not bear to see art objects trampled and destroyed, and since there was no way to return them to the imperial palaces, he brought them home. Living with these things as a girl, Edith Weyerhaeuser said she grew to love art in all its forms.

She graduated from Smith College in 1933, and earned a masters degree in education in a program at Boston and Harvard Universities. From 1935 to 1939 she taught a classroom at Beaver Country Day School in Brookline, where she was later the assistant director of placement as well as the remedial reading teacher.

Mrs. Weyerhaeuser met her husband Carl through her brother Henry, who, after Dartmouth College and Harvard Medical School, had an internship at the Miller Hospital in St. Paul, Minnesota, where the Weyerhaeuser family lived. In turn, Carl, who came east to study at Harvard, would visit the Greenleaf family when he was in Boston. Edith recalled attending the Gardner Museum, and later the opera in New York with Carl.

Carl Weyerhaeuser had been a collector from an early age, first collecting stamps, coins, books and objects that were old, as well as a definitive collection of works by Edgar Allen Poe. During college, he went abroad on a bicycle tour that followed the paths of literary giants. In her oral history of the museum and its collection, Edith Weyerhaeuser said that Carl realized on this journey that antiquity did not give objects meaning, only beauty and association made them lasting. After spending 10 years in business, he turned to the thing that was most meaningful for him—travel, where he could revel in the beauty of art in all its forms and outlets. He began to art books, paintings, Shaker furniture, Asian art and other works—many of which are now the foundation of the extraordinary permanent collection at the Art Complex Museum.

A Dream for Duxbury

Through the years, the Weyerhaeuser's collection began to outgrow their home. Sitting with her mother in their Duxbury summerhouse, Edith had the idea that they might build a museum where all their beautiful things could be shared. The idea became her dream, and it slowly began to take shape as reality. The Weyerhaeusers acquired 12 Duxbury acres where the museum is situated today. The late Ture Bengtz, a respected artist and teacher, helped architects design the museum building, with its distinctive curved roofline. Bengtz came aboard as the first director of the Art Complex but died shortly after it opened. The Weyerhaeuser's eldest son Charles stepped in and continues to be the director of the ACM. His dedication to the museum as it has grown into a recognized regional center for the arts was understandably a source of real pride to Edith Weyerhaeuser, who sat on the board of trustees at the Art Complex.

When the Weyerhaeusers traveled to Japan in 1966, Edith was taken with the tea ceremony. In each temple or museum, immediately upon arriving, Carl and Edith sat to have tea. Following this restful and quiet moment, they would be shown works of art, or the interior of a historical temple. Edith began to understand the importance of the tea ceremony as a balancing act for the hectic pace of life, and she thought this idea should find its way to America. Thus, the tea hut called Shofuan was built in Japan, and then sent here to be reassembled in a Japanese tea garden on the grounds of the Art Complex Museum. Hundreds of people have come to the tea hut though the years to observe monthly tea ceremony demonstrations in the summer months. The foresight to connect us with this ages-old ritual based on beauty and hospitality was the vision of a wise and generous woman, one who understood the significance of looking to the stars.

Those of us who enjoy The Art Complex Museum and its exhibitions, concerts and programs feel the loss of a generous benefactress whose gifts remain as a tribute to her. This summer, as part of its thirtieth anniversary celebration, the museum will feature an exhibition of some of Edith Weyerhaeuser's favorite works from the collection.